

THE ART OF THE WOODCUT  
*in the*  
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE BOOK





THE GROLIER CLUB

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## INTRODUCTION

SOMETIME IN THE LATE FOURTEENTH CENTURY the demands of a renewed and augmented popular devotion created a large market for images. The press and the woodblock served this market with pictures of the saints. By the 1440's there was a flourishing trade in these images in Venice and probably in most of northern Italy, which began to show their influence even in other lands. Thus late medieval popular culture and painting made an art of woodcut imagery that flooded fairs and marketplaces and thence onto walls, cupboards, and chests in homes on the eve of the introduction of printing into Italy.

There were two closely related uses of the images. First, there are the uses suggested by the "cult of images" that formed in this period, with its strong spiritual and fetishistic features: images were often viewed as quasi-magical objects with protective powers and they added a note of divine presence to even the most humble dwelling. Second, these images repeated the cycles of frescoes that taught the unlettered the truths of religion and stimulated their devotional sentiment. Since the woodcuts were more widely seen than paintings, they developed a new didactic or "speaking" function in the changing devotional environment. Thus, these woodcuts were not fine art, not "aesthetic objects" in any modern sense, and they were not signed; instead, they taught, reminded, inspired, and protected.

The desire for these things motivated artists to transform the old woodcutting techniques of textile manufacture, in which color designs were printed on fabrics by carved wood blocks, through the introduction of the human figure to the design. The new art developed on the basis of an old and sophisticated technique, the practiced skills of which could now be used to reproduce images from painted canvas, wood or stained glass. Popular demand changed the old manufacturing technology into a communications technology for imagery.

Wood engraving was at first employed (c. 1470-1485) to mimic efficiently or to aid the work of the illuminator. One example of this was the use of woodcut outlines of initials, called xylographic initials, in a number of Venetian incunabula, stamped onto the printed page and then often partially or completely illuminated by hand. This seems more to have been the idea of paper merchants, hiring cutter and miniator to work together, than of a printer. But as the market for printed books grew, the activity of illuminators decreased. For, as the printed book became more and more essentially a published text, it was less and less a unique trophy. Printed books were for reading, studying, praying, and thinking. There was no sense in transforming the printed book into something else by painting it, when it was wanted for reading and study.

Readers wanted to look at woodcuts in books for many of the same reasons for which they looked at images in manuscripts, in the churches, and in their homes. Woodcuts of devotional subjects, on single leaves or with text, presented episodes, singly or in series, clearly enough to engage the empathy and imagination of the viewer, as an aid to meditation. Other woodcuts provided ways of learning and

remembering religious and secular subjects. But printing changed the woodcut as it absorbed it. While the products of the press were still authenticated by the touch of the original image or type, hall-marked by the printer's device, the press made so many copies of so many objects that these changed their environment and were seen and used differently. Yet the old uses of woodcuts remained, though weakened, agents within this craft and its trade—the world into which they were absorbed, that of the printed book.

In the books published by Luc Antonio Giunta and printers associated with him we find a new kind of book illustration that drew from the established craft of woodcutting and its traditional popular imagery to provide illustrations to printed texts that now had a wider market than they had reached previously. Giunta seems to have secured the services an atelier of woodcutters of traditional popular images for himself, making it virtually his, perhaps planned as a key constituent of the business he hoped to create. Through this atelier, Giunta scooped up the long, old tradition of popular devotional imagery and brought it, re-shaped, into the realm of the printed book in Italy.

The appeal and importance of the woodcuts of the Malermi style (from the Malermi *Bibbia Italica* of 1490, printed by Ragazzo), and especially those in the Malermi and related cycles, also may be described in these terms. Most of them are small rectangular woodcuts, usually column width, set within the text or at the head of its principal divisions. Their small size, though often used in folios, parallels in a general way the diminution of book format as the fifteenth century drew to a close. Within these small spaces, the scene is skillfully composed to fit the space and successfully establishes a space behind the frame. This organization is enhanced by the fine control of the line in narrative detail and choice of background and ornament. In addition, the faces are noble and feeling. The artist shows that he works with hatching and shading tools that give vivid, bold descriptive and pictorial texture. The drawing is graceful and supple, so that the whole picture is easy to understand. Within their world, there is the intimate poetry of devotional and daily life. They bring the sincere, spontaneous, panoramic, and passionate pictures of courage, love, joy, sorrow, virtue, evil, prayer, the home, and the marketplace from the popular literature into sacred and pagan texts. Furthermore, they often bring with them imagery from oral traditions of faith and superstition. These cuts are intended to represent the text, not drawings or other works of art; they live inside the text, and the text is their proof-stone. Thus they enlarge the space of the reader's imagination, adding an extra dimension to the imaginary space of the book by means of their short-hand narrative capability. This capacity enabled the printer to use them both in liturgies and in narratives, such as the Bible or Livy, lending to narrative some sense of the cyclical ritual and giving to liturgy a vivid pictorial realism. They served as well to mark sections of text for the reader's memory, but they illustrate the text and do not schematize it. The Malermi style woodcut book illustrations are late medieval works fully harnessed to the service of the text.

These are windows into the unrecorded culture of the Italian Renaissance. This is the sphere of the popular "mentality," full of irrationality, archaism, emotions, and superstitions generally thought too



low to record. When printed in books, and occasionally censored, the woodcuts can depict images of popular belief from lost or almost lost oral traditions, mixed with approved theology or humanism. Some of the devils, apparitions, ghosts, monsters, disasters, and maps of the universe seen in these woodcuts are pictures from the landscape of an obscure, almost unfathomable, layer of remote peasant traditions. They are one clue to what Carlo Ginsburg called a screen or a filter that the non-learned reader "placed between himself and the printed page . . . that emphasized certain words while obscuring others"—that is, an oral tradition of beliefs. The popular literature has been studied recently to uncover these distant ideas, for example in the prophecy literature or in the literature about the hidden Lutheran cells in Venice. The woodcuts, appearing sometimes in learned and sometimes in popular books, are derived from an ancient popular tradition and continued to be parts of all this, expressing popular spiritual beliefs.

‘Later, in the 1530’s and 1540’s, regional artistic styles miscegenated, as they did throughout Europe, following the printing trade’s lines of distribution, in favor of an “international style” standardized by classicism. The most sophisticated stylistic ideas were classicizing, producing a demand for softer, more refined imagery that soon shed its local, earthy, folkish, stark, rough qualities. Furthermore, the evolving understanding of meaning, representation, and metaphor in the sixteenth century moved art and literature further and further from medieval ideas of presence, in complicated philosophical and artistic movements. In the realm of the illustrated book, this led to the use of allegory in picturing the text. The nature of the literary forms of the text and of the relations of text and image became more intricate as the Baroque approached, producing more complex forms of allegory and emblematics from about 1540 on.

‘Finally, toward the end of the period there arose a demand for a precision and level of detail in technical illustration that woodcutting could not produce. One can make fine lines in a woodblock only by laboriously cutting away the tiny spaces between the relief lines. On the other hand with engraving in metal it is much easier to control the thickness of the line and to illustrate detail simply by drawing it directly with the burin into the plate. As the printed text took on the job of preserving data, and with this teaching the skills of architecture, music, artillery, etc., it required the enhanced precision and detail of possible only with engraving in metal.

‘In the end, woodcutting within the realm of the printed book returned to its origins: the popular book and pamphlet of devotion, chivalric and mythic tales, elementary education, love stories, humorous verse, political satire, and folk songs. In a sense, woodcutting did not change, but book illustration did. It grew beyond the stage to which the woodcut, in a phase of its own history, had taken it.

‘BENNETT GILBERT  
LOS ANGELES

## EXHIBITION

1. *MIRABILIA ROMAE Rome: Stefan Planck, 1499*

Planck has illustrated this edition with a series of full-page woodcuts. They stand across from and next to the text but do not comment upon it or connect more intimately with it. Rather, they are traditional devotional images put into printed books. Each is a portrait within borders of suitable iconography that expands the image beyond the central figure. Here, an archer sends an arrow from the border into the principal image to add it there to St. Sebastian's sufferings. Another cut employs tiny devotional figures in the four corners of the border in addition to its central portrait of the Virgin Mary.

2. *St. Augustine SOLILOQUIO Venice: Manfredo de Bonellis, 1503*

This woodcut, of an early style, was first used by the same printer in 1497. It is an example of the changes to the devotional woodcut from its use in publishing before the innovations of the Malermi style. The artist uses straight lines, without hatching, a rough and plain composition, and no background. On the other hand, he draws from a rich tradition in the detailed portraits and the texture of the wood of the Cross. It is very much an old style woodcut of the sort made for books twenty years earlier.

3. *St. Antoninus Florentinus CONFessionALE Venice: Benedetto and Agostino Bindoni, 1524*

Both the format and style of the 15th-century single-leaf devotional image of the saint remained important in 1524, although this cut dates to at least 1489 and is French in origin. Here the book is authenticated as a devotional object by an illustration very much like its single-leaf predecessors, especially in the decorated surfaces surrounding the saint and the simple hooked-line drapery folds. But the developed skills of woodcutting as employed in books during the previous decades have enabled the artist to change the image of the saint into a more realistic and appealing portrait by the use of the outline style with simple hatching of the other parts of the figure.

4. *PAULI APOSTOLI EPISTOLAE Brescia: Damiano e Jacopo Filippo Turlino, 1537*

This is not a woodcut but a steelcut, possibly very much older than the book, white line on black ground, surrounded by woodcut borders. Stylistically, the gutter margin border is more contemporary while the other three are older, recalling the decorative motifs on surfaces portrayed in very early Italian woodcuts. The central image is one of the most powerful devotional images and could be a symbol of devotional imagery itself: as Christ's sweat conferred his authentic image by touching the sudarium, so the press transferred spiritual

qualities from original to copies. It is also a haunting example of the intensity and intimacy of small early devotional imagery.

5. *Philippus Varagiüs FLORES TOTIUS SACRE THEOLOGIE Milan: Giacomo Ferrari, 1509*

Medieval devotional and academic culture employed memory, rather than reference to published text, to develop skill and virtue. Its memory systems were ways to memorize text and to associate facts, arguments, and anecdotes into chains of ideas. They used visual metaphors and markers more easily retained than text, to which text was linked. Even the illuminations of manuscripts were sometimes clues to stimulate memory of the associated text. Here the printer has marked sections of this handbook of theology in the margins with stars, fleurs-de-lys, and pointing hands, each of several kinds. He reached into his type-case to notify the student of significant passages and to give him a visual hook to use in his scheme of memorization.

6. *Aristotle DE ANIMALIBUS Venice: for Ottaviano Scoto, 1505*

It also seems possible that the profusion of woodcut decorative initials of different sizes and from different series on the same page was a printer's version of this mnemonic technique. They helped to break up the page and provide varying visual clues for each section. The profusion of assorted woodcut initials is found as a rule only in scientific, theological, and grammatical texts – books to be studied, re-read, and memorized.

7. *St. Bonaventure OPUSCULA Venice: Giacomo Penzi for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1504*

Woodcuts were used at an early date in Germany to reproduce the mnemonic devices employed by medieval students. This edition contains full-page woodcuts of two of them: a tree, which organizes the different kinds of prayer and worship of God named in xylographic text; and a cherub, whose wings are hung with the names of philosophical concepts.

8. *Dionysius Periegetes DE SITU ORBIS Venice: Erhardt Ratdolt & Peter Löslein, 1477*

This title-page has been decorated to display its owner's coat of arms by first stamping a woodblock-produced border and then painting it. Thus this copy was customized by the employment of woodcutter and illuminator probably on the commission of a bookseller, printer or paper merchant, acting for or in search of a customer. This kind of decoration creates an illusion of the physical page, more or less complicated. It does not picture the text or aid in reading comprehension. The most magnificent of printed book illuminations, such as those by Gerardo da Cremona, do emphasize the importance of the book but seem more to draw attention to themselves than to engage the reader in the text.

9. *Antonio Beccaria (?) (DUI LIBRI DIVOTISSIMI... PROPECTO SPIRITUALE... (AND) VIA DEL PARADISO... Milan: Giovanni Angelo Scinzenzler, 1510*

This is a picture of the powerful wave of feminine spirituality that was a consequential part of the religious movement of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in northern Italy. Emphasizing the purity of a life of teaching and learning in the uncluttered surroundings, as the nuns kneel before a monk, probably St. Thomas Aquinas, we see that women were one of the groups newly seeking deepened religious experience. The event is sketched by subtly drawn lines, without hatching, in the tradition of Lombard woodcutting.

10. *Johannes de Turrecremata (MEDITATIONES Rome: Ulrich Han & Simon Nicolai Chardella, 1473*

In 1467 Han published the first edition of this work with a group of woodcuts probably taken from an otherwise lost Italian blockbook. This was the first illustrated book printed in Italy. This second edition includes the same woodcuts, as did Han's edition of 1478. The printed text explains these didactic frescoes in a Roman church, now destroyed. The woodcuts, pictures speaking through a text, were the object of reverence and interest on the part of the faithful. This passionate desire for religious imagery, based on the old tradition of single-leaf devotional woodcut images in Italy, and the involvement of the reader's imagination with the image, is thus found in the very first woodcuts in an Italian printed book. The contemporary coloring of these woodcuts testifies to the vivid reality of the imagery.

11. *Johannes de Turrecremata (MEDITATIONES Rome: Ulrich Han, 1478*

The woodcuts in this uncolored copy allow us to see more detail of the artist's work. The blocks were certainly executed prior to the printed edition of 1467. Whether of predominantly German or Italian origin, their late medieval flavor, outline style, simple backgrounds, and lack of hatching or shading show the hand of an artist working in the rich iconographic environment of the early fifteenth century, when religious fervor stimulated a great production of reproducible images.

12. *(MISSALE SECUNDUM ORDINEM FRATRUM PREDICATORUM Venice: Nicholas of Frankfurt, 1484*

This primitive Crucifixion, a simple sketch drawn in wood, testifies to the spiritual and psychological power of images quite apart from their refinement. It created in a reader's mind the image of Jesus's blood dripping off his body so forcefully that he was moved to paint it in. This missal was not simply a liturgical service book but a place of devotional meditation so intense that it has left

this dramatic vestige in the book. In this case, the printer's use of the traditional manuscript illustration at the Canon of the Mass becomes part of the engagement in the text not of an artist but of a devout priest or lay person.

13. *'BIBLIA LATINA Venice: Bonetto Locatello for Ottaviano Scoto, 1489*

Ottaviano Scoto attempted to expand the uses of woodcut imagery in books in the same year in which the important editions of Capcasa, Giunta and others began, 1489. But he did not employ their artists or participate in the wave of illustrated publication that followed. Instead, he later found his niche in academic texts. In this Bible he provides a number of explanatory, rather than narrative, woodcuts that detail the text – the breastplate of Moses or the encampment of the twelve tribes of Israel for example, or, as here, Noah's ark, displaying its population in cut-away view, a carefully layered hierarchy topped by man.

14. *St. Bonaventure 'DEVOTE MEDITATIONE SOPRA LA PASSION DEL NOSTRO SIGNORE JESU CHRISTO Venice: Matteo Capcasa for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1492*

In 1487 two Venetian printers issued an edition of this work with woodcuts from a blockbook. Capcasa then produced the first set of woodcuts expressly made for a printed edition of it when he employed a suite of woodcuts, probably by the woodcutter of the Malermi Bible, in his edition of 27 February, 1489-90, which he used again in four more editions before 1494, of which this is the third. There was also another suite of woodcuts for this text used by Benalio alone and in association with Capcasa. Both of these printers, as well as the unknown artist of these cuts, were associated with Luc Antonio Giunta in these years. This stunning image of the flagellation of Christ shows the visual qualities that the artist was to put into an advanced form in the Malermi Bible the year after making these: imagery derived from an earlier popular tradition, a complete picture in a small space, organized by the narrative order of the text; tight and active composition; and individualized figures endowed with affecting and expressive details.

15. *'BIBLIA VULGARE ISTORIATA Venice: G. Ragazzo for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1490*

This edition of the Italian translation of the Bible by Niccolò Malermi was the first of three from the Giunta press. Its series of 384 woodcuts vignettes, generally called the Malermi cycle, had a profound influence on the history of book illustration, establishing a style used extensively in Italian books for the succeeding half-century and permanently re-defining book illustration. The series of woodcuts are elegant and beautiful renderings of devotional scenes in small, brilliantly composed scenes. Their grace and charm stem in large measure from the use of devotional imagery and the traditional woodcutting techniques of religious prints. Traditionally attributed to the "Popular Designer," Dr. Lilian

Armstrong has very recently attempted to identify the artist as an important illuminator known as the "Maestro di Pico."

16. *BIBLIA VULGAR HISTORIATA Venice: ["de Anima Mia"], 1493*

After Giunta's second edition of the illustrated Malermi Bible in July 1492, the printer generally known as "de Anima Mia" published Malermi's Italian Bible with 433 woodcut vignettes modelled on those used by Giunta. There were however distinct stylistic differences, as a result of which the artist or atelier, perhaps influenced by Mantegna, is called the "Classical Designer." The figures are more statuesque, robed in flowing classical draperies; there is less detail of figures and background; and the intimate charm of the Giunta series has been replaced by less vivid and more rigid arrangements of iconography. It is in this series that the beginning of classicism in woodcut, and later in engraved, book illustration. Thus, the "popular" woodcuts of the Giunta editions and the "classical" woodcuts of the de Anima Mia edition of the Malermi Bible stand as the twin stylistic poles of the format of book illustration invented in this period as its influence developed over the next century.

17. *BIBLIA CUM TABULA Venice: Simon Bevilacqua, 1498*

The scenes – Abdias on the left-side verso and Jonah on the right-side recto – are rich in detail, set off by white space, created by controlled shading and flecking. All the cuts in this edition are copied from those of the Malermi Bible.

18. *F. Bresciano (ed.) QUATUOR PRIMUM APPROBATAS RELIGIOSIS QUIBUSQUE VIVENDI REGULAS ... S. BENEDICTI, S. BASILII, S. AUGUSTINI ET S. FRANCISCI Venice: Johann Emmerich of Speyer for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1500*

St. Benedict is here flanked by St. Placidus and St. Maurus, with a richly textured image of God in the heavens above them and a crowd of small monks in pious worship below. These outline portraits have been enhanced visually by the complexities of drapery, especially in the monks below, and by the hatched details of the divinity; textually, by a quotation in xylographic text and by letterpress text at the bottom providing a motto for devotional contemplation of the image. Thus the old portrait of the saint has been enriched visually and more fully incorporated into the printed book. The book also has two paired portraits of St. Benedict and St. Justine, the first a large traditional devotional image and the second in the small Malermi-style, thus representing the same image in two historically adjacent styles.

19. *Dante Alighieri COMEDIA Venice: B. Benalio and Matteo Capcasa, 1491*

This medieval image of the spheres of heaven has here been imported from traditional woodcut imagery into a printed literary text. It is presented in the small

column-width woodcuts pioneered in the period of this publication. The adaptation is completed by the figures of Dante and Beatrice in the upper corners. Thus it is both an image of bliss for religious meditation and an informative illustration of a printed text.

20. *St. Johannes Climacus* SCHALA PARADISI Venice: Matteo Capcasa, 1491

This woodcut is repeated by Capcasa from his joint edition with Benalio of St. Bonaventure's *Devote Meditationi*. Its very beautiful design combines the refined Renaissance style of Venetian woodcutting with the atmosphere of single-leaf woodcuts of the last half of the century; furthermore, it has essentialized all this into the small rectangular format of the Malermi style cuts. Its charm is enhanced by the small space within which so much elegant architectural and background detail is easily rendered and arranged.

21. *PROCESSIONARIUM ORDINIS FRATRUM PREDICATORUM* Venice: Johann Emerich for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1494

This cosmic hierarchy is not a theological or philosophical statement but rather a popular image, the sort of cosmology that lived in the oral traditions of the common devout in Italy. It portrays the direct line of inspiration from God in the mind of Jesus and thence in books to the religious below. Throughout this book small woodcuts skillfully executed in the Malermi style provide clear images for the meditation of those reading the liturgy, some of whom are portrayed in a fine cut of a religious procession into a rural monastery.

22. *St. Jerome (attributed)* VITE DE SANCTI PADRI HYSTORIE Venice: Francesco Bindoni and Maffeo Pasini, 1532

The several editions of this popular lives of the saints chiefly employ woodcuts used in the editions printed by Ragazzo in 1491 and by Capcasa in 1493, both for Luc Antonio Giunta. Some are woodcuts from the *Biblia Italica* printed by Ragazzo for Giunta in 1490. These column-width cuts are finely drawn depictions of spiritual life and travail, full of the images of demons, temptation, holiness, and sacrifice. This cut also shows the singular power of this style of woodcutting to depict daily life intimately—this scene in the piazza shows one man giving alms, another making a purchase at a shop, and a woman preparing fish. This combination of charm and devotional power made them effective images for readers of a deeply felt religious text. They are a perfect example of the combination of factors in the invention and success of the Malermi style of book illustration.

23. *HORAE IN LAUDEM BEATISS. VIRGINIS* Florence: Filippo Giunta, 1520

This small devotional woodcut is Venetian, rather than Florentine, in style and

perhaps came to Filippo through his brother Luc Antonio. It is a perfect picture, in the small Malermi format, of the kind of scene that probably appeared widely in the larger format of early single-leaf woodcuts, with the image of God in the heavens sending the Holy Spirit on the wings of a dove to Mary, seated in a room opening to an exterior.

24. *Ovid METAMORPHOSEOS VOLGARE Venice: Alessandro Bindoni for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1508*

This is from the marvelous suite of woodcuts Luc Antonio Giunta introduced in his edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of 10 April, 1497. Unlike most of the others, this is cut on a black ground, its terrain differentiated into the parts of the story, allowing the figures in white to stand out boldly. The white figures, along with the artist's crisp lines, give the woodcut its dramatic quality. This artist, one of the circle or atelier attached to Giunta and associated printers in Venice in the 1490's, has used these techniques to create a picture that illustrates Ovid's poetry with a drama and detail as nearly equal to those of the text as it was in his power to make it. Such an image fixes the reader's attention and involves his imagination in a story from pagan antiquity quite as much as other woodcuts focus the reader's meditations on biblical and devotional stories.

25. *St. Bonaventure MEDITATIONI DEVOTISSIME Venice: Francesco Bindoni and Maffeo Pasini, 1537*

The series of woodcuts in this edition portray this traditional medieval cycle in Malermi style proportions. Compared to the earlier versions, the increased sophistication of composition and hatching in this cuts lends brightness to its central figure and a richer texture. The deposition of Christ from the cross is shown as a strong action, as the figures in groups by his side reach across to his body. In all the cuts of the series in this volume, these strong lines mark the influence of the popular style.

26. *Valerio da Bologna MISTERIO DEL'HUMANA REDENTIONE Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1534*

The Malermi style is seen in the cycles of woodcut scenes of the life and passion of Christ that decorate even humble works of vernacular devotional poetry. Zoppino published a number of these in the 1520's and 1530's that were illustrated with woodblocks probably of single origin. The artist was especially adept at using white space to create a sort of glow around sanctified persons and at hatching techniques that also brought the picture alive. Here the devotional image was powerful enough to induce a reader to interact with it, adding blood onto Christ in his flagellation and reddening his robes in the second scene.



27. *LIBRI PONTIFICALIS SECUNDUM RITUM & USUM SANCTE ROMANE ECCLESIE* Venice: *Luc Antonio Giunta*, 1520

One of the many splendid liturgical books which Giunta was able to decorate by a seemingly endless stream of woodcut images. These grew and changed in style from the early 1490's, but they maintained the same small format, intimate relation to the text, and beautiful workmanship. In this edition there is an interesting series of woodcuts representing the construction and consecration of a church, preserving in detail this series of rituals. Here we see the laying of the first stone while the bishop make the appropriation for the costs; a band of priests are prepared to execute the subsequent rituals; and vignettes and initials marking and beautifying the texts for the pictured events.

28. *MISSALE SECUNDUM SANCTI AMBROSII* Milan: *Giovanni Angelo Scinzenzeler* for *Giovanni Giacomo Lengano and brothers*, 1522

This edition presents the Milanese rite of the mass in one of the most sumptuous Italian books of the period. This opening exemplifies its intense decorative scheme. The printer had numerous kinds of woodcuts and ways of using them at his disposal to illustrate and enhance the text. These include the giant Annunciation, which shows trans-Alpine influence; ten text cuts, small devotional cuts developed in the Malermi pattern; horizontal strip vignettes reminiscent of predellas; three borders; a head-piece; and vignette initials. These provide a dense array of imagery for this special sacred text.

29. *MISSALE ROMANUM* Venice: *Luc Antonio Giunta*, 1509

This opening presents in summary the way in which the entire book is illustrated: woodcuts and texts are intimately mixed physically and thematically; the large cuts show the great refinement of the old devotional woodcutting technique developed through the demands of printers and their market over two decades of practice, especially by sophisticated use of simple shading devices; the use of printed shoulder notes in line with replacement of the old mnemonic devices by textual documentation; and a sensuously attractive appearance, combining rich decoration, such as the large initial, with small images from the meditative tradition. This is how the mature Malermi style illustrated service books.

30. *Ovid METAMORPHOSEOS VULGARE* Venice: *Christoforo da Pensa* for *Luc Antonio Giunta*, 1501

This edition is the first re-impression of the magnificent woodcuts Giunta published in 1497, which inspired virtually all the subsequent Italian illustrated editions. Its marvelous woodcuts are like a vast cycle of miniature frescoes on Ovidian themes. This scene of Ulysses and the giant Polyphemus shows the

unique individual open-work style of the series, its perfection of line, fine sense of perspective and distance, and appealing and involving narrative. It is signed "ia", a monogram appearing in numerous book woodcuts from various printers from 1497 on.

31. *Ovid 'METAMORPHOSES Venice: Giovanni Tacuino, 1533*

In this copy of the cut from the 1497 and 1501 editions, the hand and style of the original artist has disappeared. The scene has lost Ulysses as its dominant figure—the hero has shrunk. The whole composition is more cramped and less detailed in comparison with its model.

32. *Ovid 'LE METAMORPHOSI Venice: Bernardino di Biondi, 1538*

This woodcut is a copy of the 1533 version or of some other version of the original cut of 1497 and 1501. As a copy of a copy, it shows an increased crudeness of portraiture; thick, clumsy, and even unnecessary detail; worsened labelling; and a general lack of balance and refinement. These are some of the attributes of woodcuts in the popular press in the succeeding years. Nonetheless, the image illustrates a work of Latin literature, applying a naïve and folkish sensibility to an original influenced by Mantegna and other painters and movements of Italian Renaissance art.

33. *Livy 'DECADES Venice: Filippo Pincio for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1495*

The illustrated editions of Livy printed by Giunta are one of the great bodies of Malermi style woodcuts he published. They first appeared in 1493 and are here in quite fresh state. They may be seen rather deteriorated in the later editions and were closely copied for a Paris edition in 1533. In these two cuts one can see the story-telling power of the style. In both, the figures are set off by careful systems of composition: in the cut on the left-side verso, by division between two groups, one with many persons and the other solitary; by contrast, on the right side recto, by centering the principal figure. Both woodcuts employ a diagonal line of action to illustrate the sweep and action of the Punic Wars.

34. *Livy 'DECADES Venice: Giovanni e Bernardino Vercellensis for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1506*

In this small woodcut two armies are seen locked in battle—literally locked together, as their lances merge in the middle space of their conflict. The small format gives drama and point to this simple but strong image, successfully creating a memorable picture of the text for the reader's imagination. Some of the woodcuts in this volume are taken from Giunta's Malermi Bible; Giunta had others made for the Livy by an artist in a similar style (with a different monogram); but this woodcut is new to this edition, replacing a more static image used in Giunta's first Livy of 1493 and again in 1495.

35. *Ovid* (EPISTOLE Venice: [no printer], 1537)

This one woodcut includes three scenes that tell the story of Paris and Enone. These scenes narrate the story of the text and at the same time give it a decorative visual form. The entire suite of cuts is organized by the text it illustrates and conforms to it. Thus the story-telling, shape, and beauty of the Malerini style provides a cycle of imagery for the love stories of Ovid.

36. *Ovid* (EPISTOLAE HEROIDES Parma: Ottaviano Sallado & Francesco Ugoletto, 1517)

This suite of woodcuts first appeared in a Venetian edition by Tacuino in 1501 and are attributed to the artist of woodcuts used in both devotional and secular works. Like the others of the series, this picture of the story of Cydippa's unrequited love for Acontius narrates the story in three distinct and informative scenes. The figures are statuesque with only broad details, representing a part of the cycle with clarity. The background of this scene has been quickened by a manuscript imitation of the woodcutter's surface texturing technique.

37. *Cicero* (DE OFFICIIS Venice: Giovanni Tacuino, 1514)

Ambition, Cicero says, is altogether the most miserable thing. This woodcut, one of a series picturing moral duties and conditions, is a sort of emblem of the unhappiness caused by ambitious desires. The whole series is an effective application of the Malerini format of woodcuts, executed in a classicized style, to the representation of abstractions. Tacuino introduced these woodcuts in his 1506 edition of this text.

38. *Ovid* (EPISTOLE HEROIDES Venice: Giovanni Tacuino, 1501)

This title-page symbolizes the juncture of the style of religious imagery with classical texts. Above, the traditional image of a teacher instructing his pupils is up-dated by labels naming these scholars as the commentators of this edition. Below, the printer has added to this a traditional devotional image, Christ with his staff as the lamb of God. Thus a devotional scene and a humanistic scene are joined to introduce an illustrated classical text. The suite of woodcuts illustrating the work were copied in a number of subsequent editions.

39. *Aesop* [AESOPUS MORALISATUS] Turin: Francesco da Silva, 1508

This is in the style associated with "Master of the Specchio di Anima," printed in Milan in 1497-1498, an expressive outline style with very simple texture lines and figures with large heads and short bodies. Aesop is strikingly portrayed as a wandering poet, whereas the scholar writing his words sits within a firm structure. This image is placed at the head of the text, tied to it by a playful border of putti, dolphins, and gryphons.

40. *St. Francis of Assisi* 'LA REGOLA DEL TERZO ORDINE... Florence: Bartolomco dei Libri for Piero (Pasini) da Pescia, c. 1497-1499

In the Florentine manner, the artist has created a strong and passionate image of devotion by placing St. Francis, standing, in the center, contrasted with the black ground of the mountain on one side and the town in the open space on the other. Both these and the foreground vegetation are sparsely detailed; rather, color and composition are the artist's tools. In the great illustrated literary works, in the Savonarola tracts, and in other works such as this, the Florentine style was consistent over a period of many decades.

41. *Jacopo Filipo da Bergamo* DE CLARIS MULIERIBUS Ferrara: Lorenzo di Rossi, 1497

This printer issued several great illustrated books within the space of a few years just before the end of the fifteenth century. The woodcuts are the column-width text cuts that became popular in the 1490's, executed in a distinct and very successful style. In this first text opening, we see the elaborate border to both pages reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts, enclosing on the left-side verso a panel of six scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary. These echo the six days of creation portrayed in a similar manner on the corresponding pages of Giunta's *Malermi Bible*; this style of arrangement is probably derived from paintings narrating biblical stories used in churches near the altar.

42. *Jacob Gualia* 'PAPIE SANCTUARIUM Pavia: Jacopo da Burgofranco, 1505

The series of woodcuts in this edition include two from the Ferrarese editions by di Rossi but are mostly from a distinctively Pavian artist or atelier. The images of the saints combine realism with an emotional appeal—none more so than Job, whose sufferings are made clear enough to call for our pity. The artist has succeeded in making a traditional devotional image, concentrated into the small format of the *Malermi* style, tell the story of Job and efficiently secure the reader's attentive and sympathetic response.

43. *Antonio Manciolino* OPERA NOVA Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1531

In some of the many woodcut book illustrations printed in the decades 1500-1540 when this style flourished, we can see distinctive individual as well as regional hands. In this cut, from a series illustrating the martial arts, we see the figures, fighting with swords, are exquisitely modelled and indeed seem almost to pose for us. The house, the fencing, and the other elements that set the scene are established by a tidy and controlled hand, very deliberately employing selected details and functional hatching. These bring out the action of the central figures. The printer also employed a very old devotional woodcut on the last verso.

44. *Bartholomeus Laurarius* 'REFUGIUM ADVOCATORUM Venice: Bernardino Benalio, 1516

This representation of the flagellation of Christ, distinctive in perspective and composition, suggests German influence on, or perhaps origin of, the artist, but nonetheless draws from the developed skills of Venetian woodcutting as employed by an artist of individual inspiration. Hatching and shading are liberally employed to render clear and emotive faces, and the picture has been cleverly laid out with the aim of powerfully and quickly involving the reader's attention.

45. *MISSALE MONASTICUM* Venice: Luc Antonio Giunta, 1506

The scene of the assumption of the Virgin Mary is a fine, personalized woodcut, an intimate and emotional interpretation of a classic devotional image. There are emblematic elements, such as the symbols of mortality, an unusual and intriguing composition, and a picture of a cosmic hierarchy possibly reflecting popular belief. It is interesting to note that the edition also uses woodcut initials that take the form of old devotional woodcuts in a variety of styles.

46. *Plutarch* 'VITAE Venice: Melchiorre Sessa & Pietro de Ravanis, 1516

In this work the artist has enlarged the format of his block and joined imagery from the popular imagination to a formal style, influenced by Mantegna and contemporary Venetian painting.

47. *Isidoro Isolani* 'INEXPLICABILIS MYSTERII GESTA BEATAE VERONICAE Milan: Gotardo da Ponte, 1518

A powerful series of woodcuts depicting visions is found in this description of the visions of St. Veronica. This is the largest cut, used twice. A series of smaller woodcuts depict her concourse with angels and some of the things they showed her. This is what the readers of this book believed heavenly visions looked like, in so far as the woodblock could convey their size and grandeur.

48. *Joachim of Fiore* 'EXPOSITIO Venice: Bernardino Benalio, after 4 April 1516

The apocalyptic and anti-ecclesiastical visions of Joachim of Fiore had a great following in Venice. He was a mystic and a millennialist, and the cuts in this important work largely depict his visions. Strange hybrid creatures, demons with many faces, swarms of black birds and snakes, a fire-breathing Jesus, and harrowing battles are among these. The artist, under the monogram ".M.", employed more persistent hatching and shading than in other Venetian cuts of the period to create greater contrast and drama within the framework of Venetian outline style.

49. *Dante Alighieri* 'COMEDIA Venice: Jacopo del Burgofranco for Luc Antonio Giunta, 1529

The blocks used for this edition are those used by Benalio and Capcasa in 1491.

They were employed by Zanni in 1507 and at last, like so many blocks, ended up in the presses of Luc Antonio Giunta. This cut portrays a horrific scene from the *Inferno*, in which the heads of traitors are left severed upon a field overlooked by monsters—clearly a popular image of the moral judgment of the actors of historical deeds in living memory.

50. *Giovanni Boccaccio* 'IL DECAMERONE *Florence: Filippo Giunta, 1516*

This cut illustrates the fourth story from the ninth day, in which Ansaldo has asked a magician to create in January "a garden as in May" in which to seduce Dianora. The artist has given us, in this very small space, a clear rendering of the magic garden by his use of strong hatching lines. The story moves from left to right, showing the transformation of a fireplace in the house into a spring garden arbor. In the end, Dianora's husband lets her go to Ansaldo. The woodcuts of this edition are copies of those in Zanni's Venetian editions, which in turn descend from woodcuts by the Malermi artist or a related atelier.

51. [*Leo Archipresbyter, trans. Jacopo di Carlo*] ALEXANDREIDA IN RIMA *Venice: Comino de Luere, 1512*

In the popular imagination from India to Europe since his death, Alexander the Great has been a man of supernatural power—king, warrior, philosopher, and magician. This is the earliest extant edition of the romance of his life in Italian *ottava rima*. He is displayed on the title, rendered in the Lombard style, as a warrior so immense as to subdue the background to minuscule size. He commands a large horse and indeed is described as having battled animals as well as men.

52. *Leon Batista Alberti* 'HISTORIA DI POLITA BUONDELMONTI: DIANORA DE BARDI [*No place, no printer, c. 1540*]

This reversed version of a cut that first appeared c. 1495 has all the qualities that made Florentine book illustration great, heightened by hand-coloring: unpretentiousness, concise story-telling, dramatic action. Dianora is in motion, swept along by the march of the soldiers, her hair pulled back at the same angle at which their pikes are pitched; and she is at the center of groups of men, monks and soldiers, who are robbing her of what she holds dearest. Beyond the strong walls of the family home there are fear and danger in a world no woman could control.

53. 'RAGIONAMENTO DEL TERREMOTO *Naples: Giovanni Sulzbach, 1530*

Since woodblocks were easily and cheaply prepared they were often used to illustrate brief newsletters, where their directness could add a sensational picture to the news report. The thick, rough lines of this woodcut express the terror of an earthquake, which tosses whole towns on land roiling like a stormy sea, while a volcano belches fire. The cut informs us which town were affected, but

at the same time it portrays the unopposable force with which geological disturbances control the territory in which they occur.

54. *Filippo Calandri* *PICTAGORAS ARITHMETRICE INTRODUCTOR* Florence: Bernardo Zucchetto, 1518

Italian woodcut book illustration often portrays scenes of daily life. This work of practical arithmetic is filled with woodcut images of contemporary crafts, trade, and other quotidian activities. In the four small scenes seen here, we see measurements of the size of a wall, the depth of a well, the volume of a chest, and the capacity of a sack. These and the other woodcuts provide intimate glimpses into the basic tasks of life—building a house, getting water, providing grain and wine—in a simpler age long ago and far away.

55. *Justinian I* *INSTITUTIONES IMPERIALES* Venice: Ottaviano Scoto, 1522

In this legal text, where it discusses business law, we have a picture of a merchant at the window of a dock-side stall at which he trades. Contrasting patterns in the background emphasize the meeting of land and waterway that was the linchpin of so much trade. The other cuts in this edition portray such things as the problem arising if one has killed a pauper's horse or cow and the questions of inheritance symbolized by a man in his death-bed.

56. *Antonio Cornazzano* *PROVERBI IN FACETII* Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1535

The woodcut pictures in this edition are employed to give a vivid and intelligible sense to the explanations of popular proverbs. In Pavia one handsome young man was known as a particularly fine dancer because if he favors a lady he puts his *cordone*, a “braided cord” (given as “bodkin” by the English translator), in her hand while they dance. Another man became jealous of one of the women whose attention the dancer gained by this favor, having previously failed with her himself, and then disguised himself as the good dancer. He succeeded in attracting the same lady until she discovered that his *bestiolo*, “little beast”, is littler than that of the good dancer—it is, the text says, but one-tenth the size. The lady punished him by shouting to all, “This isn't it! This is not he!”, utterly humiliating him, and giving rise to a popular expression that was a double entendre.

57. *Giovanni Antonio Tagliente* *ESEMPARIO NUOVO... A RACCAMARE...* Venice: Giovanni Antonio and the brothers de Sabbio, 1530

A pre-printed grid, produced by woodblock, was a useful tool that a printer could provide in the sixteenth century, for workers and craftsmen doing any kind of measuring—from land to lace stitches. In lace pattern books (see also numbers 58–62), designs were often marked on grid by dots or crosses in the boxes created by the intersection of grid lines. These are sometimes found today pricked

with pin-holes or with the designed area enhanced by shading the marked boxes with a dark wash.

- 58. 'RACCOLTA DE TUTTI I RITRATTI & DISEGNI DI RICCHAMI *Toscolano: Alessandro Paganino, c. 1532*
- 59. CONVIVIO DELLE BELLE DONNE *Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1532*
- 60. 'ESEMPLARIO DI LAVORI *Venice: Giovanni Andrea Vavassore, 1532*
- 61. CORONA DI RICAMMI *Venice: Giovanni Andrea Vavassore, c. 1520*
- 62. 'ESEMPLARIO DI LAVORI *Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1529*
- 63. Ovid METAMORPHOSIS *Venice: Giorgio de Rusconi, 1517*

The illustrated editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, beginning with the Giunta edition of 1497, constitute a tradition of primarily woodcut imagery that, lasting until the end of the sixteenth century, defined the vision of Ovid's scenes common to many readers of the day. It naturally had a widespread influence on decorative arts—for example, the 1497 woodcuts were widely used as models in French porcelain. Here, someone has traced the main lines of parts of the figures in the woodcut and also copied the outlines of some details, such as shoes and the point of a lance, in the margin. Whether the hand is that of an artist or a reader, this woodcut image is here seen shaping the visual sense of a contemporary.

- 64. Vitruvius DI ARCHITETTURA *Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1535*

Illustrated editions of Vitruvius provided instructional images that show how to build different structures, measure spaces, pour cement, etc. An eighteenth-century architectural student not only copiously annotated this book, supplying legends to the floor-plans, but has used his copy as a copy-book, imitating this column capital. This woodcut continued to serve as a pattern for design some two centuries after publication.

- 65. Egidio Carisio CACCIA AMOROSA ENIGMATA *Bologna: Hieronymo de Benedetti, 1520*

The woodcut shows traits of many of the regional schools of the previous decades—the black ground of the Florentine, the Venetian outline style, the strong Lombard line. These are smoothly blended in an advanced style. Furthermore, the figures are so posed as to seem to be more emblems than portraiture. Their elegance marks a refinement in taste that eventually grew beyond woodcutting's capacity to match.



66. *Virgil* 'I SEI PRIMI LIBRI DEL'ENEIDE Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1530

Zoppino first used these vignettes in his edition of 1528. They employ more lines and thinner lines than were used in the earlier Venetian style and represent a transitional style from the stylistic fundamentals of the earlier period to the classicism that followed.

67. *Cícero* (trans. Antonio Brucioli) 'IL SOGNO DI SCIPIONE Venice: [no printer], 1532

Everything rough, folkish, and spiritual has been pruned from the style of this woodcut. It portrays the classical image of the three Fates, with softly detailed faces, against a refined background of thin vertical lines. This allegorical image is presented without surface texture. It symbolically represents the subject of the text, which is destiny, rather than illustrating its action. Thus it is didactic and neither inspirational nor memorial and is a fine example of the classicized, non-regional style of later woodcutting.

68. *Johannes Maria Velmatius* 'VETERI ET NOVI TESTAMENTI OPUS SINGULARE Venice: [no printer], 1538

The woodcuts in this book use classical imagery to tell Bible stories. Here, for example, the angel expelling Adam and Eve from Paradise is a Fury. One woodcut even introduces Ovid, Virgil, and Dido; another is a marvelous neo-classical imitation of the famous depiction of the six days of the creation in the Malermi Bible of 1491. The printer also mixed a number of older blocks in the traditional devotional style along with these newer woodcuts.

69. *Benedetto Bordoni* 'ISOLARIO Venice: Niccolò Zoppino, 1534

The limits to the graphic display of information by woodcut are apparent in the maps in this volume, despite their crisp beauty: unclear directions, inexact labelling, and lack of close detail in shorelines and other areas. The thickness of woodcut lines also limited the potential of grids. Any attempt to add more data degrades the legibility of the map.

70. *Stefano Vannco* 'RECANETUM DE MUSICA AUREA Rome: Valerio Dorico, 1533

The increasing strain that technical illustration put on the woodcut medium is also evident in these graphic representations of the complex relationships of sounds. Woodcuts could provide clear images and even symbols but not large amounts of technical information. The intricate spatial arrangements required for clear presentation of data, capable of easy reference, are entirely different from the imagery used to narrate the action of a text or to symbolize general concepts. While the role of the woodcut as a locus of meditation in the medieval manner decreased, the increasing role of the book as the locus of data and text required a more precise illustrative medium than the woodcut.

71. *Johannes Franciscus Burana* 'INTERPRETATIO (ET) EXPOSITIO IN PRIORES ARISTOTELIS RESOLUTORIOS *Venice: Ottaviano Scoto, 1536*

Scoto specialized in academic texts and shows here a notable skill in interweaving text and image in order to illustrate the text. The annotations, both in the printed leaves and on a slip pasted onto one of them, demonstrate both the utility of the woodcut diagrams and the difficulties of picturing the concepts of the text.

72. *Diogenes Laertius* 'VITE DE PHILOSOPHIE MORALISSIME *Venice: [no printer], 1535*

These portraits of Cato, Curio, and Scipio are standardized images with crude portraiture and cumbersome shading and background. In them, and in the other portraits in this edition, we can see the woodcut already taking the form it assumed in popular pamphlets, ephemera, burlesques, and sacred and secular tales over the subsequent three centuries. The style has lost the refinement and aesthetic impulse that marked it in the decades when its practitioners adopted the ideas of great draughtsmen and woodcutters and when printers and publishers enabled their work by commissioning them to illustrate important liturgical, literary, and scientific as well as popular books. Instead, the rough, simple, and naïve style we see here became a style of illustration reflective of popular taste rather than of the development of fine art.





